

Is There a North China Religion? A Review Essay¹

VINCENT GOOSSAERT
CNRS, Paris

Spectacle and Sacrifice: The Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China

DAVID JOHNSON. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010. xiv, 390 pages. ISBN 978-0-674-03304-7. US\$49.95, £36.95, €45.00, hardcover.

Local Religion in North China in the Twentieth Century: The Structure and Organization of Community Rituals and Beliefs

DANIEL L. OVERMYER. Leiden: Brill, 2009. xiv, 219 pages. ISBN 978-90-04-17592-1. €103.00, US\$147.00, hardcover.

In Search of the Folk Daoists of North China

STEPHEN JONES. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010. xix, 292 pages. ISBN 978-1-4094-0615-0. £55.00, hardcover.

Scholars of Chinese “popular religion” in the largest sense (including those reviewed in the present essay) have long complained that fieldwork-based studies are massively skewed to southeastern China, and that generalizations and models worked from these studies misrepresent actual practices in north China. Whereas fieldwork seemed very difficult in most of north China up to the 1990s, and few local scholars were attracted to the topic, the situation has changed dramatically over the last fifteen years or so. A recent flourish of major publications has been directly addressing this imbalance, making a large amount of primary material available and trying to de-southernize, as it were, our understanding of Chinese religion.

This essay will begin with presenting and briefly discussing three major recent books that all take the above issue as their core question, before trying to engage with them, along with

¹ I am very grateful to Adam Chau, Vincent Durand-Dastès, and Isabelle Charleux for comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

other relevant publications, and raise several theoretical and methodological issues elicited by attempts to define a north China religious field. It will argue that while there is no solid basis for opposing northern to southern religion, the field is ripe for a much-needed rigorous definition of religious regional systems (such as, for instance, the Northern China Plain).

David Johnson's *Spectacle and Sacrifice*

David Johnson's much-awaited book builds on his twenty years of research on village festivals in Shanxi, some results of which had already been published and widely read. The book discusses first New Year festivals in four villages (one actually in Hebei but very close, both geographically and culturally to Shanxi), and then, and at greater length, temple festivals, notably three cases of the massive *sai* 賽 of the Changzhi 長治 area celebrated by village alliances in large temples. All of those no longer exist, even if recreated performances have been organized by local scholars and cultural cadres. So even though Johnson is familiar with the area and has conducted interviews, his work consists mostly in analyzing the detailed reports published by local scholars (many of them in Taiwan under the umbrella of various projects initiated by Prof. Wang Ch'iu-kuei 王秋桂). As a result, the focus is on liturgy and structure, rather than collective and individual experiences, social organization, or the economic aspects of festivals.

Johnson is a senior scholar who has mature ideas and convictions, and lays them out clearly, which makes reading his book fascinating and highly rewarding even when one does not share all of these convictions. One of his key ideas is ritual autarky: villages in Shanxi (and in most of north China) were self-contained, fully autonomous entities that developed their own rituals in complete indifference to what was going on elsewhere, resulting in huge variations. In his finely detailed descriptions, Johnson insists that difference between villages is more important and interesting than structural similarities (unfortunately, we do not get to compare two *neighboring* villages). While he proposes some reasons to explain differences (a lineage-controlled village, for instance, had a more staid, patriarchal New Year celebration than multi-surnames villages), he absolutely refuses to offer generalizations. The case of the *sai* is different from the New Year festivals, because they involved specialists (*zhuli* 主禮, that is, Confucian ritual specialists, and hereditary musicians, *yuehu* 樂戶) who had scripts and performed in various villages, but he insists that *sai* were all very different from each other.

Yet, for all his focus on descriptions and differences between different sites, Johnson also develops powerful analytical tools in the form of ideal-types that can be used to analyze any village festival anywhere. He insists that all festivals combine to various extents spectacle (exorcism, processions, mask tableaux played on the ground) and sacrifice (food offerings,

historical opera played on stage) and that these two basic components have different functions: the former separates men and gods, the latter pulls them together. This certainly constitutes one of the most sophisticated models to date for thinking about village festivals. He finally proposes the fascinating hypothesis that opera became central in Shanxi festivals (in Song times) to humanize and replace actual sacrifices of scapegoats; the exorcisms performed in the various festivals he describes are played by actors and not by possessed spirit-mediums. So while most of the book is descriptive and not historical, it ends with suggestions for using the spectacle/sacrifice analysis in terms of historical change.

Daniel L. Overmyer's *Local Religion in North China*

Overmyer's work shares some hypotheses and ideas with Johnson's, notably that the core of Chinese religious experience is found in village rituals, that these have barely been studied yet, especially in the North, and that when studied they reveal a world very different from that of elite, clerical religions. They share a predilection for what is rural, amateur, and archaic, over more urbane, professionalized forms of religion. Although his formulations are less radical than Johnson's (Overmyer seems to have met more Daoists and Buddhists in the field and in his previous work and is more inclined to keep them in the picture), they point in the same direction, namely that it is villagers, peasants during the day, who are the main if not unique authors, actors, and beneficiaries of village religion.

His methodological approach though is very different. He proposes (without much of an attempt to justify it) to look at north China as a coherent whole, and draws on published reports—some of which, from four counties in Hebei, he commissioned and edited together with two Chinese sociologists, Fan Lizhu 范麗珠 and Hou Jie 侯傑.² Thus, he describes village religion item by item (the chapters cover: rain rituals; leadership and organization; temple festivals; Gods; beliefs and values) by drawing examples from various areas, briefly abstracting, quoting and/or translating the original reports in each case. Overmyer does not have Johnson's deep interest in performing arts, so he does not discuss much opera and processions, but he goes into village social organization in more depth. Both exclude family practices (death rituals, healing, home worship, etc.) to focus on communal religion, and as a result, spirit-mediums and *yinyang* specialists (unless they are hired to conduct sacrifices at

² Daniel L. Overmyer 歐大年, Hou Jie 侯傑 & Fan Lizhu 范麗珠, *Baoding diqu miaohui wenhua yu minsu jilu* 保定地區廟會文化與民俗輯錄 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2007); Daniel L. Overmyer 歐大年 & Fan Lizhu 范麗珠, *Gu'an diqu minsu jilu* 固安地區民俗輯錄 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2006); idem, *Handan diqu minsu jilu* 邯鄲地區民俗輯錄 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2006); idem, *Xianghe miaohui, huahui yu minjian xisu* 香河廟會、花會與民間習俗 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2007).

festivals) are given short shrift. In terms of ritual, Overmyer sees all north China festivals as characterized by a common three-part structure: Inviting gods by reciting their names (*qingshen* 請神); welcoming them (*yingshen* 迎神) in a procession followed by offerings; and sending them off (*songshe* 送神). This provides the framework for comparing different festivals.

As a result, Overmyer's book reads in large part like a state-of-the-field account, listing what we know about communal religion in the whole of north China, thus abstracting an already formidable amount of Chinese scholarly literature and drawing attention to interesting parallels (he is among other things attentive to terms for ritual specialists or ritual roles and their variations) and fascinating details. A map would have helped get a sense of the distribution of discussed festivals, or terms, or practice, for some provinces are only represented by one case study, while the area where Overmyer and Fan Lizhu did fieldwork, in central Hebei, is more densely documented. Overmyer does discuss the same field reports as Johnson, thus offering different views on the same material.

Stephen Jones' *In Search of the Folk Daoists of North China*

Stephen Jones has been working for over twenty years in northern Chinese villages, documenting ritual music and performances. After several monographs devoted to case studies (one on a Hebei village, two on specific local ritual traditions),³ his latest book is a bold attempt at taking a larger look at Daoist ritual as performed in various settings and areas throughout north China, most notably for village festivals and funerals. The book is arranged geographically, abstracting material from published evidence and providing more details based on his own field observations—of the three books discussed so far, this is the one with the richest body of first-hand observation. Jones is interested in performance, not liturgy, so he has not focused on the liturgical texts as is the mainstream practice in the field; rather, he compares performances in terms of structure and style. His training as a musician provides him with tools to think about how to compare performances, but his audience is not (only) musicologists; he also deals with how rituals fit the villagers' religious, social, and emotional needs. Indeed, while Jones' work and that of many Chinese colleagues he works with and quotes are too often classified (and sidelined) as "music studies," they actually deal with village religion in all its dimensions. Thus, his bibliography is just as long and rich as those of Johnson and Overmyer, and interestingly quite different.

³ Stephen Jones, *Plucking the Winds - Lives of Village Musicians in Old and New China* (Leiden: CHIME, 2004); *Ritual and Music of North China: Shawm Bands in Shanxi* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); *Ritual and Music of North China: Shaanbei* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

Besides the focus on performance (and therefore a focus on living traditions), another aspect of Jones' work that sets it apart from Johnson's and Overmyer's is that he does not separate family and communal aspects of religion (funerals and festivals)—since Daoists do both. In that regard, his anthropological sensitivity may be closer to those of two other pioneers of north Chinese religions, Adam Chau⁴ and Thomas DuBois,⁵ who have looked at local religious systems (in villages in North Shaanxi and central Hebei respectively) in their totality, rather than defining communal festivals as a self-contained topic.

But the most original aspect of Jones' work within the nascent field of north China religion is his sensitivity (linked to his focus on performance) to modern and contemporary change in ritual practice. The huge spatial variations he observes and documents (present-day Daoists can do a full-fledged five-day *jiao* 醮 in some places, and can only do short rites in others) he does not ascribe to village autarky, but rather to two factors: 1) different regional systems, and 2) very different rates of liturgical loss from one village to the next. He documents how specific rituals became gradually simplified and streamlined throughout the twentieth century (both because skills are lost and because demand from patrons changed), a process that continues unabated. He thus addresses the crucial, but risky question of contemporary change under both political and socio-cultural constraints a question that most scholars tend to avoid.

Some Issues

Even before the above three major works were published, there was already a bubbling field of "north China religion studies." A workshop, organized on this theme in Paris on April 7, 2006 by the Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcités (EPHE-CNRS) had gathered some of the Europe-based participants in this field;⁶ many of the ideas of themes laid out here were expressed during that workshop, and I rely on my notes to discuss them.

1. Defining North China

All scholars of Chinese culture know that North vs. South is a rhetorical tool, not a description of actual fact. Chinese authors have long mused about religious differences between "north" and "south," from late imperial writers opposing the fox-infested north to the

⁴ Adam Yuet Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁵ Thomas D. DuBois, *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

⁶ Participants included Stephen Jones, François Picard, Susan Naquin, Marianne Bujard, Adam Yuet Chau, John Lagerwey, Adeline Herrou, and Vincent Goossaert.

Wutong 五通-plagued south (an opposition foreign to the authors reviewed here, but that merits some attention) to Gu Jiegang's 顧頡剛 theories about dominant associations (*xianghui* 香會) in the north and territorial *saihui* 賽會 in the south. Yet North and South never fail to crop up in all the studies discussed so far, as if it they referred to a valid, well-defined reality. All three books discussed above have the term "north China" in their title, which is obviously appropriate in all cases, but may not refer to the same thing and therefore calls for some methodological discussion. Our scholars tend to oppose what they see in their northern fieldwork to southern, or southeastern China, even though the scholars thereby invoked (such as John Lagerwey, David Faure, and Kenneth Dean) have never talked of any such entity and have always insisted on how very different the religious situation is, even in different parts of provinces such as Guangdong, Fujian, or Jiangxi—note also that Jiangnan and Sichuan, among others, are strikingly absent from the discussion when comparing North to South.

Similarly, the publications discussed here fail to fully define the geographical area they study, and why they define it as such. Johnson is squarely focused on Shanxi (even though it is not a culturally homogeneous area), while Overmyer studies the north China plain (broadly speaking, present-day Hebei, Henan, Shandong, and Shanxi). Shaanxi (with the exception of some locales close to Shanxi across the Yellow River) seems out (except in Jones' work, which discusses Shaanxi and even Gansu, the two being closely linked culturally), which may very well be justifiable; but as an unfortunate result, Qin Jianming and Marianne Bujard's study of a temple festival in Pucheng 蒲城 district,⁷ which is one of the most comprehensive studies of a living festival in any part of China north of the Huai River, tends to be ignored by the books discussed here. The absence of Manchuria from the discussions (with its massive modern migration from Shandong) is even more surprising. Southern Henan (discussed by Overmyer) is yet another story, closer to northern Hubei in terms of both cults and dialect... It would greatly benefit the field to eventually come up with a good definition of what we mean by north China when we speak of religion.

Fieldwork scholars tend to be extremely wary of mapping their data, preferring to document cases rather than doing higher-order surveys. While there is much truth in the idea that collecting first-hand data while it is still there is urgent, and that maps and generalizations can always be done later, the mental maps of China we have do impact the way we choose fieldwork sites. Rather than jump from village case studies to generalizations about China or north China, it seems useful for certain purposes to look at local and regional continuities, and find areas that share common religious characteristics. Conceptual tools to this end need to be forged, as the macroregion (as developed by William Skinner based on marketing networks), which has played this role for socio-economic history, is utterly ignored by cultural and

⁷ Qin Jianming 秦建明, Marianne Bujard 吕敏, *Yaoshan shengmu miao yu shenshe* 堯山聖母廟與神社 (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 2003).

religious studies, and has come under increasing criticism in its own disciplinary field.⁸ The only exception was Hill Gates who has refined the macroregion model by focusing on differences between the regions and exploring what these differences meant in terms of religious culture.⁹

Whatever the level used for comparing and the meaningful units eventually defined, we know that they will *not* correspond to any administrative geography (even though we all end up talking in terms of county, prefecture, and province for lack of a convenient alternative), but we do not know to what extent maps of dialects, of opera genres (either literati styles or ritual operas), of cults, of Buddhist/Daoist clerical organization, of architectural styles and folk art, etc., overlap. Whether they do or do not, this says something important about local religious culture. And scholars have already hinted at specific relevant areas, including Johnson who talks of a *sai* area (where the mammoth, very “Confucian” *sai* he describes existed), Jones who defines a *yinyang* area (northern Shanxi, where Daoists who share the label *yinyang* 陰陽 have a very rich repertoire and dominant role), and Susan Naquin who has been attempting in her on-going work to define a religious area (closer to the north China plain than to broadly defined “north China”) defined by the all-important Bixia yuanjun 碧霞元君 cult. Similarly, Ye Tao’s recent remarkable book on pilgrimages to Taishan¹⁰ evidences a shared religious culture in much of the north China plain that takes part in the pilgrimage, which conveys an image somewhat different from Johnson’s ritual autarky of villages.

The scholar having done the best attempt in this direction is Stephen Jones who has mapped different areas (that ignore all administrative boundaries) where Daoists perform broadly the same repertoire; very interestingly, Daoists tend to be important in temple festivals in some of these areas, and not in others. Buddhism is very much waiting for a scholar who will look at ritual practice, especially in the countryside.

And once we have actually identified areas we can compare within the “North” or throughout China, there will come the even trickier issue of explaining the differences: 1) ethnic factors? It cannot be entirely irrelevant that some parts of north China have long been under the rule of non-Han dynasties and that a significant amount of intermarriage has taken place, and still does (for instance, in Inner Mongolia); I am a bit unsettled not to find the word “Mongol” in any of the above books’ indexes, whereas works on religion in southeastern China do as a rule pay attention to issues of ethnicity.¹¹ 2) The long-term history of how each

⁸ Carolyn Cartier, “Origins and Evolution of a Geographical Idea: The Macroregion in China,” *Modern China* 28.1 (2002): 79-142.

⁹ Hill Gates, *China’s Motor: A Thousand Years of Petty Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Ye Tao 葉濤, *Taishan xiangshe yanjiu* 泰山香社研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009).

¹¹ Participants in the 2006 workshop also pointed out that differences in death practices, such as double burial in southern China, may best be explained by ethnic differences dating back several

part of what is now China was integrated into the empire, on which model and on what terms (which for the North will require very early evidence indeed)?¹² Or 3) ecological-economical differences? A “village” does not mean the same thing in different parts of China, and even while the concept of territorial community, *she* 社, appears in virtually all reports, its meanings vary, as does that of the Earth gods. Or 4) differences in income levels? Are we talking of north and south, or poor and rich China? The field is wide open.

2. Where are Buddhism and Daoism?

One driving idea in Johnson’s and Overmyer’s work, which has been critiqued by Jones, is that village religion in north China is different from elsewhere because it has received little influence from Buddhism and Daoism. It does indeed seem that, on aggregate (if that means anything) large-scale Daoist rituals are less frequent in north China than in those areas studied by Lagerwey, Dean, Faure, et al. But it would seem that Johnson and Overmyer sometimes cross from that observation to a more radical stance, namely, that Buddhism and, especially, Daoism are *not* important. In this regard, I find that Johnson’s assertion that the rituals he describes reflect “the non-Buddhist, non-Daoist religion of rural north China” (p. 282)—even though he discussed ritual specialists burning a memorial to the Jade Emperor (e.g. p. 113)—might be a bit of an overstatement (this type of memorial burning is typically Daoist; in Confucian liturgy a memorial is read but not burnt, as seems to be the case indeed in the *sai* he discusses). Leaving aside the question of why scholars would want to show that Daoism and Buddhism are not important (and that Confucianism is not a religion on a par with them), I would like to point out that these ideas may be based on a rather elitist idea of Daoism and Buddhism. That there are no Daoist priests in attendance at a given festival does not mean that Daoism is absent, any more than the absence of an imam or a monk or a pastor prevents people from being Muslims or Buddhists or Christians.

I would thus rather like to re-read some of the evidence used by Johnson and Overmyer while considering the possibility that Buddhists and Daoists (among other specialists of course, because Daoists never monopolize the field) have played a role, transmitting practices and ideas, but are not on the scene anymore for fieldworkers to see them (not to mention cases where they *are* there but fieldworkers do not pay attention to them). First, Buddhists and Daoists do train amateur villagers (in instrumental music, scripture chanting, opera

thousand years (even though Kitans and Mongols also practiced double burial!).

¹² This line of thinking is notably pursued by David Faure. Both Johnson and Jones attempt to show that modern north China village religion formed during the Song, yet at least part of north China was well integrated within the empire already for a long time by the Song. During the 2006 workshop Marianne Bujard insisted that north China religion was characterized by a very long-term documented continuity, and by the related fact that gods there were *not* ancestors (and stone temple steles thus played the role of genealogies further south).

performing, and other ritual skills), who then become independent. This is abundantly shown in Stephen Jones' book as well as in his earlier work on Hebei village performers,¹³ some of whom still call themselves Daoists (*laodao* 老道) and can tell from which (usually urban) temple they learnt—this should caution against drawing a line between village and city, which used to share a common religious culture before the twentieth-century policies sent them in opposite directions.

Second, even though we have liturgical manuscripts that reach back to the mid-Ming, descriptions of actual festivals are all based either on present-day practice or on oral recollections of mid twentieth-century celebrations. By that time, the situation of the clergy had already changed to an important extent, with temple-based clerics expelled and ruined by the temple expropriation movement (as early as the 1910s in quite a few northern Chinese rural areas), and the hiring of clerics reduced by state appropriation of village funds for festivals. Our idea of the roles of the various specialists (*lisheng* 禮生, spirit mediums, Daoists, Buddhists, etc.) in northern Chinese village celebrations would hugely benefit from a comparison of a detailed description of a festival before the 1870s with its current counterpart. I suspect, even though this is no more than a working hypothesis, that what we might find is less a difference between a Daoist south and a village-Confucian north, than a picture of variation everywhere, and regional differences in the impact of twentieth-century anti-superstition policies. Where corporate lineages and villages were stronger, the revival was also stronger.

Whereas Johnson, Overmyer, and Jones are all rather interested in long-term stability (indeed, a key issue in ritual studies), some Chinese scholars have worked extensively on Ming-Qing sources and have attempted to trace modern changes in these village rituals, and it would be foolish to ignore their findings. Granted, published pre-1911 sources are very heavily laden with ideological positions and never describe in any great detail one given village festival. But they do document changes that affected (to various extents) all village festivals.¹⁴ And late Qing and Republican-period newspaper reports of festivals can be quite detailed and informative on changes then, such as replacing one type of ritual specialist by another, adding or dispensing with a specific rite, the changing role of women, or the modes of financing festivals.¹⁵ In other words, the much-welcome recent interest on variations in space should not obscure the importance of variation in time. Also, it is very unclear to what

¹³ Jones, *Plucking the Winds*.

¹⁴ One influential work in this direction is Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜, *Kuanghuan yu richang: Ming Qing yilai de miaohui yu minjian shehui* 狂歡與日常—明清以來的廟會與民間社會 (Beijing: Shenghuo-Dushu-Xinzhe sanlian shudian, 2002). Overmyer dismisses Zhao for his idea of festivals as carnivals, which may indeed obscure the study of temple rituals, but Zhao nonetheless has very interesting things to say on pre-1911 village religion and regional variations.

¹⁵ See for instance James Flath, "Temple Fairs and the Republican State in North China," *Twentieth-Century China* 30.1 (2004): 39-63 (not cited by either Johnson or Overmyer).

extent religious differences between various parts of China may have decreased or increased over the past 150 years; as the contemporary revival of communal religion depends to a very large extent on the local specifics of the process of destruction during the twentieth century, and of the contemporary local politics, it is quite possible that differences may have increased significantly.

3. The larger picture

This leads us to the third issue. Johnson notes that some of the reports he works with describe a festival without saying a word about village temples and other religious features (and quite a few of the reports used by Overmyer suffer from similar problems). This leads to questioning the consequences of choosing to take the annual major village festival as the best manifestation of village religious worldviews, beliefs, and values. Indeed, even though such festivals may indeed be what villagers take most pride from and invest most feelings in, it is also possible to analyze a village's religious universe by taking full account of all that exists there, including spirit-mediums and devotional groups ("sectarians"), *jiaomen* 教門 and their recitation of *baojuan* 寶卷.¹⁶ The first scholar to really address this issue upfront for rural north China was Thomas DuBois in his book on village religion in Cangxian 滄縣, central Hebei, following on the footsteps of Susan Naquin's work on Beijing (which she saw as reflecting the religious culture of the north China plain).¹⁷ Building on the work of other scholars, such as Li Shiyu 李世瑜, Lu Yao 路遥, and David Ownby, DuBois showed that the *jiaomen* may have been independent religious groups in urban contexts, but fused with village religion in the countryside. Many "sectarian" temples are now the village temples (and officially registered bona fide Daoist temples), and as Jones also shows, many village rituals, both New Year celebrations and temple festivals, include the chanting of "sectarian" scriptures, even when no-one identifies with the *jiaomen* that originally produced it.

Overmyer's book does discuss the place of the *jiaomen* in village religion (pp. 181-83), but, again, as a historian, I cannot help but plead for more modern-historical analysis. The rise of the *jiaomen* in the northern Chinese villages (and the whole area, however it is defined, was affected, but to varying degrees) necessarily changed rituals as well as beliefs and values. Surely, aren't there documented cases of villages where the rise of a *jiaomen* changed the date, the place, and the focus of the main temple festival? Another key element that, to my opinion, does not yet receive its due attention in the surveyed publications is spirit-mediums. It would seem that most scholars tend to oppose communal religion (New Year, temple festivals) with elaborate liturgy, taken to be the most important expression of village religion and the best

¹⁶ During the 2006 workshop, John Lagerwey pointed to *baojuan* recitation as a key specificity of village religion in north China as opposed to southeastern China.

¹⁷ DuBois, *The Sacred Village*; Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

expression of its core values, to individual/familial rites, including cures by spirit-mediums, funerals performed by *yinyang*/Daoists/Buddhists, etc. Yet, in many present-day villages, only the latter aspect—individual/familial rites—is left (and thrives). What are the implications? Also, spirit-mediums are actually often prime movers in temple construction, and in organizing pilgrimages and group rituals.¹⁸ This is where relying on others' fieldwork is tricky because some local scholars won't write (even though they may very well know it) that the person they describe as a "community leader" is actually a spirit-medium. As Adam Chau has shown in his remarkable study of one northern Shaanxi temple, geomancers and spirit-mediums, usually under the state's radar, have actually benefited from the twentieth-century anti-superstition campaigns and play a larger role in village religion than they used to.¹⁹

All the above, of course, is in good part lazy speculation: the main point is that, thanks to the extraordinary work done first by Mainland local scholars, and then by the Sinologists who have worked with them and/or with their data, the field of religious studies now fully encompasses north China, thus allowing for innumerable new questions, new theories, and new debates. This allows, as Susan Naquin pointed out during the 2006 workshop, for new ways of thinking about Chinese religion starting from differences rather than commonalities. All this is cause for much celebration.

¹⁸ Kang Xiaofei, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Fan Lizhu, "The Cult of the Silkworm Mother as a Core of Local Community Religion in a North China Village: Field Study in Zhiwuying, Baoding, Hebei," in *Religion in China Today*, ed. Daniel L. Overmyer, *The China Quarterly*, no.174 (2003): 359-372; Zhou Xing 周星, "Si damen: Zhongguo beifang de yizhong minsu zongjiao 四大門——中國北方的一種民俗宗教," in *Diyu shehui yu xinyang xisu: Lizu tianye de renleixue yanjiu* 地域社會與信仰習俗: 立足田野的人類學研究, ed. Wang Jianxin 王建新 & Liu Zhaorui 劉昭瑞 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 323-353.

¹⁹ Chau, *Miraculous Response*.